New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1952

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NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK MIRROR
NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM & THE SUN
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK TIMES

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"See the Jaguar"

DAILY NEWS

December 4, 1952

'See the Jaguar' Lovely to See And Hear, but It Makes No Sense

By JOHN CHAPMAN

So much of the best theatre has gone into "See the Jaguar," which Lemuel Ayers and Helen Jacobson presented last evening at the Cort Theatre, that it is a pity that one small ingredient was left out. The ingredient I mention is a play, and a play is no more than a believable story. If "See the Jaguar" had a reasonably credible story, it would be the best new piece on Broadway—but it hasn't, so it isn't.

During the first act I was excited. Here was a piece which had atmosphere, strong character and very good writing by its author, N. Richard Nash. Really good writing in clean, lean verse. Here, too, were some promising characters in a picturesque setting of a small store in mountain country. Here, too, was movement—and, believe me, the contemporary stage has got so tired that practically nobody ever moves anywhere on a stage any more.

Run Downhill.

This first act was exciting, but the next two just trickled down one of the mountainsides so beautifully designed by producer Ayers, who also is a scenic artist, losing force as they fell. At the end the play seemed quite silly to me; Nash's fine-sounding words amounted to an incredible fable about a boy who was kept in an ice house by his mother for 18 years and when he got out he was sweet but simple-minded. "Dark of the Moon" was much more credible in this same vein.

A summary of "See the Jaguar," minus the hocus-pocus, would go like this: A nutty old woman dies, leaving 900 dollars cash somewhere, and her son comes out of the ice house and admires the sky for the first time. All the people hanging around the store, except two, think the son must have the money, and they want to catch him—but he is hard to catch, after all that time in the ice house, and more than a mite skittish. The one who wants the money most is the storekeeper because the old woman owed him a big bill before she sang herself to death. The storekeeper is a big ess oh bee who is very brutal and keeps live animals in cages, outside for people to look at.

The two people who sympathize with the simple-minded boy from the ice house are the storekeeper's daughter and a brawny but high-minded country schoolteacher. This schoolteacher is so high-minded, indeed, that he has got the girl pregnant, and there is quite a bit of talk between them about love, possible marriage and the child growing within her. (Having seen "I've Got Sixpence" the evening before, I was, last evening, quite fed up with expectant parents who hadn't married after all their beautiful love. I must be a bluenose.)

Well, the townsfolk who are after the poor boy's nine C's chase him all over Lemuel Ayers' fine mountains, and catch him, and put him in one of the animal cages in front of the store. The boy doesn't like this. He wants to go back to the ice house. At the end, the high-minded but rugged schoolteacher liberates this elderly waif from his cage, and is shot dead for his pains—leaving his pregnant girl still pregnant and understandably downcast.

The foregoing summary is minus hocus-pocus. It isn't much better with the hocus-pocus, but it is some better. Arthur Kennedy is a rugged fellow as the teacher, Cameron Prud'homme is a mean old man as the storekeeper, and Constance Ford is an attractive expectant parent of an already half-orphaned child. There also is a nice character part played by Roy Fant, who is a harmless old coot engaged in the business of tattooing mountaineers. Before last night I never heard of a mountaineer getting tattooed, but Fant makes a good job of it. As the boy, James Dean is very good.

With all those good actors, with all those fine Ayers sets, with all the vigorous direction of Michael Gordon, and with all the really admirable verse-writing by N. Richard Nash, it's a pity everybody didn't come out with a play. Because we need a play, badly.

"SEE THE JAGUAR"

Play by N. Richard Nash; incidental music by Alec Wilder; staged by Michael Gordon; settings and costumes by Lemuel Ayers; presented by Mr. Ayers in association with Helen Jacobson at the Cort Theatre, December 3, 1952. The cast:

Hilltop.....Phillip Pine
Yetter.....David Clarke
Janna.....Constance Ford
Gramfa Ricks.....Roy Fant
Mrs. Wilkins..Margaret Barker
Dave Ricks....Arthur Kennedy
Brad....Cameron Prud'homme
Harvey.....George Tyne
Frank.....Arthur Batanides
Meeker.....Ted Jacques
Mrs. Meeker.....
Florence Sundstrom
Wally Wilkins.....James Dean
Jee Jee.....Dane Knell
Sam.....Harrison Dowd
Andy.....Harry Bergman
Carson.....Tony Kraber

New York Post

December 4, 1952

By Richard Watts Jr.

Death and Ideas in the Mountains

If N. Richard Nash, author of "See the Jaguar," which opened at the Cort Theater last night, will forgive me for describing his new play in the words of another dramatist, I would say that it is full of sound and fury, signifying nothing. A melodrama about love, hate, pursuit, sadism and death in a mountain district somewhere in what may be, so far as I could learn, either the Ozarks or the West, it obviously is using its lurid and distraught narrative for the most serious moral purposes, but they are unfortunately wrapped in chaotic obscurity.

There is the chance that Mr. Nash might have been able to tell a passably good melodramatic story about a chase if he had been satisfied to offer anything that simple. But he is chiefly concerned with his moral issues, and, although I agree that it is splendidly high-minded of him, it has the melancholy effect of confusing things hopelessly. Amid a noisy crash of symbolism, "See the Jaguar" totters between forthright story and lofty parable, and, as so often happens in such cases, it proves to be completely unsuccessful in both fields.

Man in Cage

According to the playwright, there is in this mountain community a great bully of a man who has bad dreams and a pretty daughter and keeps wild animals in cages. There is also a young schoolmaster, who loves the daughter and is scorned by the father, and he tries to save from the old man's sadistic wrath a youthful innocent who had been locked up in his mother's ice-house. Through a moment of moral weakness on the part of the teacher, the boy is captured and imprisoned in a cage meant for a jaguar, and the idealistic pedagogue is killed trying to rescue him.

Perhaps too constant playgoing has played tricks on my mind, but I confess to great difficulty in trying to decide what Mr. Nash is driving at in the story which I may have telescoped rather abruptly. Obviously, he is preoccupied with something more than an interest in the loves and hates of a mountain community and the sight of an actor locked up in a cage. He clearly treasures both his ideas and his symbols, as well as the rolling prose with which he has set down his dialogue. But clarity in expressing ideas is not one of his virtues.

The Ideas

I take it that he is, in general, contemplating the plight of idealism, decency and innocence in a savage world of mob brutality and dictatorial ruthlessness. I suppose he is telling us that unthinking mankind bestows power on men who are mentally sick, like his community boss. It is possible that he is assailing the idea of appeasement when he shows that the teacher's effort to make a deal with the boss ends in the caging of the young innocent and his own death. Whatever he is saying, he is not skillful about it, however fine his motives.

It assuredly isn't the fault of the actors. Arthur Kennedy, who always combines masculine forcefulness with sensitivity in his playing, is, as usual, excellent as the teacher, and it is a shame to see him wasted in the role. James Dean achieves the feat of making the childish young fugitive believable and unembarrassing, and Philip Pine and David Clarke give individuality to indeterminate roles of minor mountain bullies. The other players are at least satisfactory, and Lemuel Ayers has contributed some fine, brooding mountain sets. But "See the Jaguar" is wildly ineffectual.

The New York Times.
December 4, 1952

Arthur Kennedy Heads the Cast in Richard Nash's Symbolic Western Drama, 'See the Jaguar'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

N. Richard Nash, who wrote a simple play called "The Young and Fair" in 1948, has now written one that is waist-deep in symbolism. "See the Jaguar," he calls it, with a metaphorical accent. With Arthur Kennedy in the leading part, it opened at the Cort last evening.

Since every one concerned with the production has worked very hard, one should no doubt be full of respect for the effort. Mr. Nash has weighed every word, making sure that it has several meanings on several levels of intelligence. Lemuel Ayers has enclosed the drama in spectacular settings of the mountainous West. Michael Gordon has directed it as though he were preparing the company for battle. And the actors run, jump and shout until the audience is exhausted.

* * *

But work is not admirable unless something is accomplished. And in the opinion of one theatregoer, "See the Jaguar" accomplishes nothing but noise and confusion. Mr. Nash had no trouble in saying something intelligible in "The Young and Fair." But now it is a point of honor for him to speak in portentous parables. Using the romantic framework of the Western drama as his point of departure, he shows how the horrible and violent people persecute goodness, how defenseless innocence is in the face of organized society, how some people want to put life in cages and some want to open cages and how hysterical the rule of hoodlums can be.

In consultation with a wise man of the theatre to the left, this department had a notion that Mr. Nash might be artistically dramatizing McCarthyism trampling down the pure in heart. Could be. But if so, why doesn't he say so? Or to get right down to cases, why doesn't he say something about something out of professional loyalty to the English language?

The performance comes close to perpetual motion. And the production is so entrancing that a deaf person might fall in love with it. Mr. Kennedy looks so rational that you expect him to make sense as the pivot character in the play, but he doesn't. The dialogue throws him. Constance Ford, wearing dungarees, is a fetching young lady who can act, too, and should not be required to suffer so much over such a rugged Western landscape. As the brutish leader of the community, Cameron Prud'homme scowls and bellows effectively. And Roy Fant contributes a winning character portrait as a sweet old man who hangs on to the rim of the community.

* * *

Taking their cue from Mr. Nash's tortured literary style and tangled craftsmanship, they all work their heads off, never walking when they can run across the dooryard or up the jagged slopes of Burden Hill (symbolic). But nothing understandable comes out of the performance. When the final curtain came down, this theatregoer felt especially grateful to the makers of a movie Western that is eloquent without losing its simplicity. "High Noon," terse in style, makes a clear and devastating statement. "See the Jaguar" is verbose and says nothing.

Journal American
December 4, 1952

Play Is Baffling And Confusing

By JOHN McCLAIN

THE surging emotions of a segment of Southern American hill folk were given a pretentious and bewildering going-over in something called "See the Jaguar," which opened at the Cort Theatre last night.

Arthur Kennedy and a group of capable actors took part in the strident hoe-down but when the dust had lifted from the floor it was difficult to determine what, if anything, had been happening.

This is one of those intense, earthy dramas which reveals primitive love and conflict in the raw. Eugene O'Neil has been able to bring such characters to life, but N. Richard Nash, who wrote the one under consideration, was able only to produce confusion and bafflement. I didn't begin to understand anybody on the stage and didn't care, frankly, what befell them.

Kindly Souls

What M. Nash seemed to be telling, the hard way, was the struggle of violence versus gentleness, the losing battle of man against organized brutality.

Arthur Kennedy is a kindly soul and he is in love with Constance Ford, a gentle lady. But they are surrounded by a group of ruffians who are in the power of Connie's father, played by Cameron Prud 'Homme, and so when the chips are down they unite to destroy the gentle people.

The gimmick employed to create this crisis is a strange young man, James Dean, who has been locked in an ice house for about 20 years. The gentle people want to protect him, the mob wants to grab him and get the money his mother is supposed to have left him.

I am just as tender as the next fellow and I don't like nasty mob violence by countries, or groups, or individuals. But I don't think Mr. Nash made his point with much clarity or charm—and I certainly couldn't understand his boy from the ice house, or quite why his mother chose to keep him in the deep freeze all those years. Or why, for that matter, he chose to remain.

Excellent Acting

Forgetting the befuddling details, there are excellent performances by Arthur Kennedy, Cameron Prud 'Homme, Roy Fant, Phillip Pine and several others in the large cast. I never believed that Constance Ford was part of this squalid group, but that was not particularly the fault of her acting.

The sets devised by Lemuel Ayres, who also produced, are properly ample and suggestive of the stark Southwest mountain country. And Michael Gordon, a director of proven capabilities, at least manages to maintain a certain pace and urgency while shifting his strange pawns around the board.

But if you want to "See the Jaguar"—you had better hurry.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune
December 4, 1952

'See the Jaguar'

By WALTER F. KERR

IN "SEE THE JAGUAR," which opened at the Cort Wednesday, author N. Richard Nash has come within inches of working a theatrical miracle. He has taken one of the most venerable and most stereotyped formulas of our time—a formula which has served the movies ever since William S. Hart first made peaceable critters out of violent mountain men, and which has served the stage ever since Lulu Vollmer's fightin' hill folk first came out of the Carolinas—and very nearly made it all seem fresh, vivid and believable.

Basically, he is telling the old story of the upright schoolteacher who is determined that the lawless rule of a frontier tyrant shall come to an end. The tyrant, in this reworking of the American fable, is a brutal storekeeper with a passion for caging the things around him. He has already caged a weasel and an ocelot and set them on display before his shop; he hopes to bag a jaguar on the mountainside and add him to his collection. Symbolically, he has caged the whole countryside as well: he owns the land, the homes, the people themselves. Young Dave Ricks, who is passionate about human freedom, hopes to uncage them all.

* * *

In dramatizing this threadbare allegory, Mr. Nash has done a number of things astonishingly well. He has captured the speech of a fairly primitive people without caricature, without self-consciousness, and he has sometimes made it poetically touching. He has given his characters some complexity: the bloodthirsty boss is also a bit of a child who cries out in his sleep; his daughter is no mere ingenue but a clear-headed girl who knows that she has a strong strain of her father in her, a strain with which she must do battle. And the story itself has been told with a rapid, punchy pace.

Just to make things still more hopeful, the production which Lemuel Ayers has provided is of tremendous assistance at every turn. Mr. Ayers' own settings—of a jagged mountain ridge, a forbidding ravine, a desolate cathedral of leafless trees— supply a rich, colorful, and exotic atmosphere in which these struggling symbols can seem at home. Arthur Kennedy, surely one of our finest actors, is on hand to give burning intensity to the angry, straightforward young idealist. The candor with which he tries to be fair to all sides, the passion with which he denounces a loutish and murderous crew, and the tense restraint with which he checks his own impulses to violence are honest and exciting theatrical images. Roy Fant is enormously

"See the Jaguar"—*continued*

effective as a dirty old man with clean hands, Margaret Barker is eerily touching as a mountain crone getting ready to die, Constance Ford is vibrant and appealing as the tormented heroine. And James Dean adds an extraordinary performance in an almost impossible role: that of a bewildered lad who has been completely shut off from a vicious world by an overzealous mother and who is coming upon both the beauty and the brutality of the mountain for the first time.

• • •

It is the author's bad luck—and ours, too—that so much that is striking finally goes down the drain of an over-insistent symbolism. Mr. Nash must too often force his people into arbitrary attitudes in order to make his intellectual point. There are a good many times when the characters seem to have nothing to do in life but act out this particular thesis, and they lose humanity by being cut so close to a pattern.

By the time we reach the play's preordained climax—the mountain lad is actually locked in the jaguar's cage—the parallelisms of the piece have become just too pat, have slipped past the point of my belief. Michael Gordon's wonderfully vigorous stage direction continues to pound away at us; the actors drive on with almost compulsive conviction, but the story we have been following has descended to obvious mechanics, to the manipulated working-out of an abstract idea. It is possible to admire, and to sympathize with, the idea itself; but the people have ceased to interest us as people. What started out as a surprisingly convincing evening ends as a disappointingly contrived one.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

December 4, 1952

'Jaguar' Has Obscure Spots

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

"See the Jaguar" is a play of poetic quality that takes place in a world of barbaric viciousness. Its strange story is symbolic and striking, but it suffers from the tragic inconvenience of being very obscure.

It would frankly be easier to discuss it one had read it, because the acting so often slips into series of vocal explosives that the lines are hard to follow. The principal characters change their point of view and bargain on subtle moral differences, until the loss of very few words can be thoroughly confusing.

Refers to Signs.

The title refers to the signs over several caged animals outside the mountain store of the heroine's father. He is a harsh bully who owns most of the community's buildings and is owed money by all the people. He disapproves of the school teacher his daughter loves because the young man causes people to ask questions. They begin to wonder, for instance, who made the old man sheriff in the first place.

When a daft country woman dies in debt, it is suspected that her hidden money is held by the son she kept locked away from the world's sin in her ice house. Prodded by the sheriff, the crowd sets lustily to hunt the boy, while the school teacher and the girl try to save him.

Because the characters shout at each other so much, their arguments grow empty and bombastic. Thus it is hard to tell just why at any given moment the hero and heroine are in disagreement. She is to have a baby, who, though unborn, is one of the most consistently disparaged characters ever mentioned in a play.

Turned Over to Crowd.

Eventually the school teacher turns the boy over to the crowd, on their promise not to hurt him, hoping to reconcile the girl and her father. But the sheriff locks the boy in the cage meant for the jaguar, and the teacher is killed helping him to escape.

All this has dramatic force and activity, but like the argument, the movement seems to shuttle back and forth, rather than to get anywhere. I would suspect that the play was conceived in a mood of more sinister suspense, and less of the shouting nervous turbulence with which it is now played. The treatment constantly tries to give vital reality to a play which is not intended to be so literal.

Vivid Portrayal.

Arthur Kennedy dominates the work as the school teacher, making him vivid and masculine and desperate, even though he is not always able to define any plumb line to his fight against the crowd's cruelty or its hatred of innocence.

Constance Ford, as his beloved, is an extremely talented young actress, who is never at a loss with a character whose opinions and devotions are mercurial. She gives every separate scene substantial value, and it is a pity that there is not a more logical progress to her story.

Roy Fant is humorous and sympathetic as a cheery old man who loses his life in the big hunt, and Margaret Barker is wistful and dignified as the unbalanced mother. Cameron Prud'homme is the ruthless bullying father, and Philip Pine is forceful as his younger counterpart. James Dean is gently awkward as the ignorant boy.

Daily Mirror

December 4, 1952

"See The Jaguar" Opens at The Cort

By LEE MORTIMER

Musicians have a saying: "When in doubt play 'Poet and Peasant.'" In Hollywood, when they are in doubt, they make a Western.

N. Richard Nash, the author of "See the Jaguar" which opened last night at the Cort Theatre, is a gift from Hollywood. Apparently he was in doubt. The advance notices spoke of this as an "allegorical Western without a horse." Come to think of it, maybe that's what was missing.

I have no idea who N. Richard Nash is, nor do I care, but I am sure he must be a young man who is lovingly spoken of by his doting relatives as "a genius." Furthermore, he is a man with a message, though I think Western Union could have delivered it better. The version I got was slightly garbled, but it seemed to be that Man (and spell that with a capital "M," Mr. Printer) is a caged animal and should be set free. Strike off them shackles, fellow-wolkers, you have nothing to lose but your chains.

For the second time running in two nights, the heroine of a new Broadway play is énciente (as they say in my refined circles) without benefit of clergy, and personally I am beginning to wonder what these playwrights have got against the marriage-license clerks who have got to make a living, too.

Only this time instead of in Gramercy Park the little accident happens beyond and beyond or where men who are men are supposed to prove it by acting like pigs.

The drawback is that Arthur Kennedy, who has temporarily been unemployed for several years because he is a school teacher by trade in a town without a schoolhouse, is in love with Constance Ford, the beauteous daughter of the local magnate and liquor dealer. And Pop (Cameron Prud'homme) figures a guy who can read book writing and refuses to kill or cage animals, is no man. But the biological facts prove Pop is wrong.

Mr. Nash's great opus tries to be a "Tobacco Road" with a Harvard education, but I put it down as a hoss opera without a hoss. I have met many hill-billies, the genuine kind of Murray Hill, and the gotten-up ones of the Ozarks who dress and act that way because the tourists expect it, but so help me, I have yet to hear one speak like the persons in Mr. Nash's play. I am wondering if I misjudged Mr. Nash's age; perhaps he got his dialogue writing experience during the days of the silent films.

You can tell when actors are really great, when they sell themselves despite lines that would gag a Y.M.C.A. social director playing the unsullied hero in the annual theatrical and strawberry festival. Arthur Kennedy takes plenty of abuse from Nash but comes out a winner, and Miss Ford is altogether too pretty and talented to be made to look so silly. No show is complete without a character actor who thefts the show. This has two, namely Roy Fant as Grandpa Ricks and James Dean who impersonates a weird young man locked up in an ice house since childhood by a weird old mother who wants to isolate him from the wicked world despite which Nash gets to him. Prud'homme is another fine artist.

But for me, the best line of the evening was not emoted on the stage. It came from the seat in back where my good friend, Mr. Sam Chapman was sitting.

He remarked, "I was on trial all day, and here I got to go through it again tonight."

"I've Got Sixpence"

New York World-Telegram
and
The ~~Evening~~ Sun

December 3, 1952

'Sixpence' Probes Young Hopes

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

John Van Druten, whose enduring fame so far rests on his numerous enchanting comedies, turns serious in "I've Got Sixpence" to consider the spiritual beliefs and hopes of modern young people.

It is not exactly a crystalline or conclusive play, but seems to be saying that the form of one's religion is unimportant, as long as there exists some faith in a power stronger than man. That is the sixpence of the song, that you can lend and spend, yet keep all your life.

Familiar Events.

It is unjust to brief this story, because the events sound trite, but their familiarity gives impetus to the argument. Two proud and independent young people fall in love and have an affair. The girl sees a world of wonder and love, and the boy only bitterness and a need to escape ties. When she is to have a child, he strikes out viciously to avoid responsibility. But his very efforts to free himself, by cheating a woman who has helped him, drive him to disgusted despair. Finally there seems to be a future for them in his realization that selfishness destroys him.

The boy is an ex-Communist, and the stubborn author of dreadful fiction. He is conveniently related to a very rich old lady whose solace for her near blindness is a religion based on the "All Effulgent." Add to this the fact that he has no charm, and certainly no redeeming feature of character, and the love affair becomes rather special.

Sex Versus Spirit.

In fact one point of the play is very well made in its illustration of how static and boring conversation about sex can be, while the conversation about the spirit is searching and progressive.

The physical production indulges in a distracting variety of ways and means, with screens, transparencies and resolves.

Edmond O'Brien has a thankless task in playing the boy here, about whom you would never have heard a good word. He has some striking passages but has developed a perilously facile technique that can seem remarkably offhand. His hearty appearance suggests that his alleged hunger in the story was chronic.

Viveca Lindfors is not just a pretty girl, but a real beauty, with a whiplike figure, and an ability to inspire deep sympathy. If she were less attractive she would sometimes seem self-consciously graceful, but plays with intense sincerity.

Brightest Spot.

It is Patricia Collinge, as the elderly, weak-sighted woman whose dependence on spiritual help makes her so realistic, who is the brightest spot of the evening. As a performer she has turned the remarkable trick of cleaning her slate completely, and building a character with no manner of speech, motion or charm ever associated with her before. It is a captivating and believable portrait, stacked for sympathy, it is true, but dimensional and rich.

Vicki Cummings does the best job of her career, similarly ignoring tricks and mannerisms, to give a touching picture of a puzzled young lady who wants to relax into security.

"I'VE GOT SIXPENCE"

Play by John van Druten; staged by Mr. van Druten; entire production designed by Boris Aronson; costumes by Burton J. Miller; presented by Gertrude Macy and Walter Starcke at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre, December 2, 1952. The cast:

Inez Cabral....Viveca Lindfors
Doreen.....Vicki Cummings
Dr. Oxmunian.....Paul Lipson
Peter Tyndall..Edmond O'Brien
Mrs. Entwhistle.....
Patricia Collinge
Carolyn.....Lois Holmes
Robert Gallagher...Bert Thorn

Journal American

December 3, 1952

Viveca Lindfors Sparkles in a Hit

By John McClain

THERE is not the slightest doubt that Viveca Lindfors is a bright new sparkler in the Broadway firmament, that Edmond O'Brien scored a walloping success in his return to the theatre, and that John van Druten has another hit in "I've Got Sixpence" which opened at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre last night.

Miss Lindfors, who arrived from Sweden via Hollywood, got off to a middling start in the play but progressed in easy stages until, during the emotional moments of the final act, she revealed herself as an actress of unusual depth and perception. The single scene in which she contemplates suicide should rank with the best in recent seasons. In her earlier moments she seemed committed to strange postures, as though addressing a golf ball, but this was happily forgotten once she got into the serious business at hand. She will surely remain a fixture on the current scene as long as suitable material is available. As the lady who sits next to me remarked: "If you can look good with that hair-do —you're beautiful."

Difficult Role

Mr. O'Brien, who has been wasting a lot of talent lately playing private eyes and chasing crooks up Hollywood alleys, is given one of the most entirely distasteful parts in recent history—yet he comes out slugging and manages through sheer strength to make it believable. Well, almost believable.

For I have had great difficulty in going along with Mr. van Druten's love stories through the years. In this one he has made Mr. O'Brien a hopelessly disenchanted ex-Commie who has ceased to believe in anything but futility. He becomes involved with Miss Lindfors, who has faith and the sort of simple religion that makes her thrill at the sight of a tree or small flower.

This leads to the inevitable scene in which the girl tells her lover that she is about to have a child. At which Mr. O'Brien springs to his feet and says, in effect, "Well, you got me into this. Now you're on your own."

All this, suddenly, to the girl who has loved him and lived with him for months. I didn't expect him to propose marriage, but I didn't believe an alliance with the Communist Party would explain such strange brutality, either.

Other things I didn't quite approve were a religious crank who preached "peace through the all-effulgent," a character drawn, it seemed, with too broad a brush; and a few lines here and there during the romantic interludes which impressed me as unnecessarily lacking in taste.

But none of this is sufficient to nullify the impact of a compelling story, wonderfully well performed; it holds you despite yourself.

Good Support

Patricia Collinge, ever reliable, runs away with a couple of strong scenes as a blind benefactress who has fallen into the clutches of the disciple of effulgency; and Vicki Cummings gives an adept and plausible performance as Miss Lindfors' roommate, embracing religion in time to tip off the finale. Bert Thorn is suitably comical as her steadfastly Catholic fiance.

Boris Aronson has run up a brilliant series of sets, effortlessly moving the action from a small apartment to a park bench, thence to Miss Collinge's plush living room, with a minimum of noise and delay. The author has directed expertly, perhaps with a slight overemphasis in Mr. O'Brien's more emotional moments, but with unerring restraint most of the way.

This may not be remembered as Mr. van Druten's most laudable play, but it will probably be recalled for some time as the vehicle that brought Miss Lindfors to town.

"I've Got Sixpence"—*continued*

The New York Times

December 3, 1952

AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

John van Druten has written a little play on a big subject, "I've Got Sixpence," acted at the Ethel Barrymore last evening. Since he is an able writer and director, and since he has cast Viveca Lindfors in the chief part, there are many things to enjoy in the production. For Miss Lindfors is a handsome young lady with a lot of firepower in her acting. Cast as a woman of faith, courage and independence, she stirs Mr. van Druten's placid little play when she dips into an emotional scene. Towards the end the play is not quite substantial enough to be stirred by anything. She is still there, but "I've Got Sixpence" has drifted off somewhere else.

* * *

Mr. van Druten seems to be saying that everyone has to believe in something—religion preferred. Always a familiar writer with sympathy for ordinary people, he starts off proving his thesis in terms of two unmarried girl room-mates. One is artfully trapping a suitor into marriage. The other, who has visions of grandeur in her soul, refuses to be either cynical or ambitious, but withholds herself for a great uncalculated love.

Mr. van Druten is at his best in mating scenes. And his description of the recklessness with which this second girl falls in love with an unlikely egotist and ne'er do well is romantically exciting. But one theatregoer cannot get over thinking that Mr. van Druten's attempt to find salvation in the consequences of this love affair is inadequate and inept. At the end he seems to think that his lovers have found faith and a future. It is more likely that they have laid the foundation for a lifetime of bitterness, muddle and suffering.

* * *

Although Mr. van Druten's philosophy is elementary, it is never painful because his manners are pleasant, his attitude is full of good will and he can write beguiling scenes with no trouble. In "I've Got Sixpence" he skips through a whole landscape of fugitive scenes. Boris Aronson, who has designed the production, has slipped through the landscape as nimbly as the author, sketching the scenes lightly, giving them distinction and finding agreeable scenic devices for the transitions.

Count on Mr. van Druten to cast his play lucidly. In the part of the villain, Edmond O'Brien gives a harsh and honest performance. Although the author seems to have some hope for this character, Mr. O'Brien's forceful performance ought to dispel any easy illusions. The villain is odious now and will shatter any future that he manages to invade.

* * *

Patricia Collinge plays the sentimental part of a rich widow with a delicacy of touch that is expert and winning. Vicki Cummings, cast as the practical young lady who calculates her chances, has the best part she has played for several years and gives an amusing, neatly detailed performance. Especially in his first scene, which is shrewdly written, Paul Lipson is delightfully simple as a third-rate religious prophet. Bert Thorn makes something plausible and familiar out of a suitor with religious scruples.

An old hand at the theatre, Mr. van Druten has made an amiable evening out of the crises of recognizable people. But he is attacking a great theme this time. "I've Got Sixpence" is neither strong, pertinent nor coherent enough to prove Mr. van Druten's high-minded thesis.

New York Post

December 3, 1952

By Richard Watts Jr.

John van Druten's Missionary Mood

John van Druten is a dramatist with ideas and creative imagination and a theater craftsman of the highest order, but I thought he let us all down dreadfully in his new play, "I've Got Sixpence," which opened at the Ethel Barrymore last night. Even when he is not in his top form, Mr. van Druten can usually be depended upon to bring a fresh dexterity to his writing, but this time his drama is uncharacteristically dull and sluggish, and he has developed a serious viewpoint which he offers with a remarkable amount of unpersuasiveness.

I have no doubt that the distinguished author is entirely in earnest in his new mood of religious mysticism, but there is, it seems to me, a curiously hollow ring to it. What he has given us is a kind of lugubrious missionary's version of "The Voice of the Turtle," and, while it may be spiritually a very fine thing to find him discovering a mystic element in sex, rather than the fun he used to discern in it, he seems curiously uncomfortable about it all, and his conversion appears rather more distasteful than edifying.

The Similarity

"I've Got Sixpence" certainly begins as if it were going to be "The Voice of the Turtle" all over again. There are two girls, one ingenuous and the other experienced, in the fashion of the earlier play, and there is a lonely young man, who also seems to belong to the proper pattern. The sort of affair that Mr. van Druten made famous in his brilliant sex comedy starts pretty much as one familiar with his writing would expect, but from then on something new has been added. It is a message, and a decidedly serious message, that rears its mystic head.

The girl is an idealist and a dreamer, who believes there is beauty and wonder in life and has a religious spirit, although she has tried the conventional religions unavailingly. The young man, on the other hand, is bitter and unhappy and believes that life is a trap. He has tried Communism and been disillusioned with it, and he isn't having much success as a writer. The love affair is a dismal one, and, when it seems that there is going to be a baby, he heartlessly abandons the girl. But the Hound of Heaven is on his trail.

The Aunt

It appears that the young man has a rich aunt, who has a piety of her own and gives him money from time to time, and she has her spiritual wants administered to by a sloppy, bearded fellow who talks about the All-Effulgent. The old lady is a bit dotty and the old man a bit of a fraud, but there is spiritual truth in them, and, for all his mockery, they impress the young scoffer so much that he begins to think of others for a change and finally does right by the girl. I'm glad he did, but I fear it makes for a very stuffy conclusion.

Mr. van Druten is obviously so serious about what he has to say that it seems a particular shame to find his preachment so shallow and pompous. But even the straightforward simplicity of Viveca Lindfors as the girl, the great charm of Patricia Collinge as the old lady, the rather original humor of Paul Lipson as the stranger, the forcefulness of Edmond O'Brien as the lover, the familiar brightness of Vicki Cummings as the other girl, and the work of Bert Thorn and Lois Holmes in minor roles are not enough. The playwright's conversion is simply not credible.

DAILY NEWS

December 3, 1952

Van Druten's 'I've Got Sixpence' A Pretty Solemn Quest for Faith

By JOHN CHAPMAN

It is not impossible that many playgoers will find John van Druten's new drama, "I've Got Sixpence," profound, beautiful and inspiring. I am genuinely unhappy to report that this piece, so earnestly written and so admirably played, touched me only once or twice last evening at the Barrymore Theatre, for I have deep respect for van Druten's skill, intelligence and integrity.

"I've Got Sixpence" is not the light-minded frolic one could expect from this dramatist; it seems to me to be the author's own search for a satisfying religious philosophy—and a high-minded attempt to see deeper into the human soul than he has before. As a play, though, it is uneven—fine theatre for a few moments and then downright pretentious for longer moments.

Two Troubled People.

My trouble is that I cannot get interested in or feel for the two principal characters, no matter how sincerely they are played by Viveca Lindfors and Edmond O'Brien. Miss Lindfors, who is a willowy beauty with a Frankie Addams haircut, portrays a forthright, self-reliant girl who believes in something beyond herself, but she does not know what this something is. O'Brien, rugged and grim, impersonates a completely embittered and faithless man. These two embark on a casual affair and find that they have taken on more than they bargained for. They both need love, and he needs faith besides—and they have a harrowing time finding the mystical ingredient which will make their lives full instead of empty.

Miss Lindfors and O'Brien act very capably, but the lady who steals the show is Patricia Collinge. Miss Collinge, once the unforgettable Birdie in "The Little Foxes," now is the unforgettable Mrs. Entwhistle in "I've Got Sixpence"—an old lady, almost blind and very rich, who has found a sweet religion which makes her happy in spite of painful infirmities.

Indescribably Touching.

It makes no difference to this beautiful and wonderful old lady that her religion is a mumbo-jumbo invented by a soiled and bearded charlatan. It keeps her going—and in her first scene Miss Collinge does some indescribably touching, gallant and artful acting. And another very good performance is

given by Paul Lipson as the charlatan.

Van Druten has sought to show another kind of human, too—the ones who have a definite, clear-cut and comforting faith. In the case of the play they are Vicki Cummings and Bert Thorn, who have spiritual security in Catholicism. Very oddly, it seems to me, the author uses them for comedy relief.

The setting, being by Boris Aronson, is a treat to the eye as it depicts various scenes—a bachelor girls' apartment, a rich old lady's home, an Italian restaurant—in New York. Also, being by Aronson, it accomplishes technically and mechanically what the author wants.

The trouble with me is, I don't know what the author wants. "I've Got Sixpence" is either beyond my depth or beyond van Druten's.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

December 3, 1952

'I've Got Sixpence'

By WALTER F. KERR

IN "I'VE GOT SIXPENCE" John Van Druten has got that old-time religion, but I am afraid hallelujahs are not exactly in order. Mr. Van Druten has apparently taken another look at that bright and funny working-girl world he used to write about so blithely—in "The Voice of the Turtle," for instance—and decided that something was lacking.

The characters in the new play at the Barrymore—a couple of girls who share an apartment, a young writer whose world has gone sour on him—aren't precisely sure of what is missing from their lives, but they think it may be spiritual value. The girls are tired of occasional sex; the boy is bitter about everything—politics, marriage, his creative ambitions. Unfortunately, the religious types they run into are fairly appalling. There is an untidy mystic given to unintelligible aphorisms about the "mysterious all-effulgent." And there is a belligerent Catholic who isn't interested in much except the Church in which his children are to be reared.

How these groping, and decidedly garrulous, young moderns thrash it out with their souls—taking some pretty severe falls in the process—is the burden of Mr. Van Druten's moral homily. It does turn out to be a burden. So long as the author is doing what he has done before, lightly skimming across a reasonably sophisticated surface, things are fine. He has written Vicki Cummings a very funny scene in which she anticipates every one of her Catholic suitor's rigorous attitudes. He has written Patricia Collinge, who acts as a sort of fairy godmother to the group, several pleasantly conspiratorial sequences. Traces of tart humor, and accurately recorded shopgirl speech, turn up now and then.

But the moment Mr. Van Druten turns his attention to more elevated matters, both his wit and his wisdom seem to desert him. Though his two heroines begin as wry and knowing creatures, they suddenly take to spouting the platitudes of a schoolgirl pageant for the foreign missions. Wide-eyed, they find themselves speculating that "perhaps life is wonder." They indulge in apostrophes to trees, to the "miracle of the seed in the earth." The savage and cynical young man finally gets around to announcing "I've got a feeling here inside of me, like a bird beating its wings." Quite a few speeches tee off with constructions like "Somewhere, beyond the beyond, bathed in light." . . .

As the language becomes more and more fulsome, the characters turn to milk and water. Toward the end of the evening, an impassioned Viveca Lindfors is heard to declaim "I happen to be a human being"—but she isn't. By now she has become a walking attitude, a mere reflection of the author's own random and rather foggy speculation on matters spiritual, and the play has turned into a pious, but not very illuminating, tract.

* * *

It is acted very earnestly. Miss Lindfors is a lithe and lovely girl with an engagingly boyish stance who makes the most of her limited opportunities. She has an effective moment in her wordless effort to tell her alarmingly callous young lover that she is pregnant, and she struggles mightily with some second-act melodramatics which might have conceivably been written by Channing Pollock. Edmund O'Brien, as the writer, is required to be consistently beetle-browed and perhaps a shade too two-fisted; he is, in any case, submerged in a remarkably unattractive role.

Vicki Cummings has a good bit of fun with the sarcasm of her best scenes, but she is fearfully stuck—throaty voice and all—with an ultimate conversion during which she must murmur, "Remember when we were wondering whether sex was all right?", assuming an expression of brand-new innocence the while.

Patricia Collinge is a decided lift to the proceedings in her relatively brief appearance as the writer's cagey old aunt who has lost her eyesight but not her wits. And designer Boris Aronson is very nearly the hero of the evening, taking us ingeniously through a half dozen accurate and evocative backgrounds.

Mr. Van Druten's "sixpence" of the title is that inner integrity which, when it has been earned, sees us through the barren stretches, and the inevitable catastrophes, of life. The image is an appealing one, and the play which has been fashioned around it is obviously a work of good will. But it is an embarrassing one, nevertheless. In reaching for a new and more profound dimension, a very able craftsman has sacrificed those dimensions he had already mastered: the ring of direct, familiar speech and the impact of honestly drawn character.

Daily Mirror

December 3, 1952

Van Druten's 'I've Got Sixpence' a Hit—If You Understand It

By LEE MORTIMER

Those of you who have read thus far will have noted by the above by-line that the saloon department continues to substitute for drama critic Bob Coleman, who is still ailing.

Candor compels me to confess that my many years in the guzzle parlors, while not completely wasted, taught me little about coping with the peculiar idiom employed by fashionable intellectuals like John Van Druten, who penned "I've Got Sixpence" at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre. Apparently words have different meanings where I come from because the bigdomes among the honest-to-goodness critics and the smart sophisticates in the cash-and-carry section of the audience, made out as though they understood what was going on and even seemed to enjoy the proceedings.

All I caught were the dirty words and tom-cat situations, of which there were plenty. But even some of this was above my head because they can't get away with so much in the gin dives. I heard stuff last night that would make Joe E. Lewis blush, but then, of course, neither Joe nor I have much time for art, being merely low-brows who don't use four letter words in company.

Which means that "I've Got Sixpence" is probably a hit. All I could make of it is that it's a battle between God and materialism. Of course the Lord wins, but for several scenes it is nip and tuck.

Edmond O'Brien, who is really a splendid performer, takes a licking here, playing the most odious heel seen in this village in years. Honestly, friends, it's not his fault, but I felt like hissing as they did in the old fashioned mellers. This is a louse who gets a girl in trouble and refuses to marry her, sponges on his aunt, and writes poetry. He is forgiven for all but the last.

And what do you think his excuse is? The poor, misunderstood lad is an ex-Communist who refuses to testify against his co-conspirators. Now, so he says, he can't get a job or sell his bum literature, and it's probably all the fault of Joe McCarthy.

Of course, this is not true to life. Van Druten knows as well as I that former Reds who refuse to testify either become editors of pink newspapers and attack Joe McCarthy or work for the U.N. at 20Gs a year.

The victim of this scoundrel is Viveca Lindfors, and Van Druten doesn't do right by her, either. There just aren't dames like the one she plays around these parts, anyway, not north of Greenwich Village where the plot would have to be different.

She, too, is a rebel—and you guessed it—also quotes poetry, something about a salamander with a tail. Heaven help me. This actress has great and rare talent, and it crops out sometimes, but her Scandinavian accent plus the long and silly speeches, grow tiring, anyway to an ear better attuned to rumba bands.

Van Druten did spare Patricia Collinge who is simply stunning as the wealthy old aunt who goes in for New Thought. Vicki Cummings also gets a break, which she takes advantage of, as Viveca's roommate. And Paul Lipton thefts all the loose honors as a sanctimonious faking faith healer.

"I've Got Sixpence" is suffering from the devaluation of the pound.

"Hamlet"

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

December 2, 1952

'Hamlet'

By WALTER F. KERR

THERE are at least two passages in the Barrault "Hamlet" now at the Ziegfeld which are managed more brilliantly than this reviewer has ever seen them. One is that brief but challenging tour de force, the Ophelia mad scene. Simone Valere is the Ophelia in this instance, and she is thoroughly appealing, if rather conventionally so, in the play's earlier scenes. But when it is time for the shattering pathos of her final appearance—mindless, wanton, grotesque—Mlle. Valere rises to the moment with such shocking credibility, with such complete surrender to the role, and with such infinite tenderness that her playing must go down as one of the most memorable fragments in many seasons.

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Nor is she alone in making the sequence chillingly honest, unusually moving. The silent embarrassment of the other figures as they stand helplessly by, making no move to interrupt her frantic flight from an intolerable world, is ensemble work at its most controlled, its most meaningful.

The other really illuminating contribution which this Barrault-directed production has to make toward our understanding of "Hamlet" is the treatment given that solemn old theatrical troublemaker, the ghost. We are accustomed to hollow, sonorous, and declamatory readings of the part, readings which suggest the ghost's remoteness rather than his reality. Barrault—through an astonishingly exciting performance by Jean Juillard—has given us a disturbed, passionate, and feeling ghost, and the inspiration goes a long way toward giving urgent and fiery motivation to everything that follows.

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The performance which Jean-Louis Barrault himself is giving in the central role is, however, another and much more complex matter. M. Barrault is singularly unfortunate in the first image he offers us of the melancholy prince: whether the evening's sometimes erratic lighting was at fault, or whether the makeup M. Barrault has devised for himself is unluckily macabre, the fact remains that our first glimpse of the star suggested not so much a Gallic Hamlet as a Charles Addams Hamlet. And, as the evening goes on, there is some insistence on an almost existentialist gloom: in the uncontrollable, almost psychotic savagery of Hamlet's snarling at Claudius, in the merely playful callousness of his relations with the other characters, in the pettish tantrum of his attack on an empty throne.

There are, to be sure, many striking things in this generally feverish interpretation. There is the sadness of Hamlet's resignation as he squares his shoulders to do battle with a corrupt Denmark. There is the sudden apathy which overwhelms him as he completes his instructions to the Player King. There is the reserve with which the most famous of the soliloquies is begun, and above all the anguished longing Barrault gets into the "to die, to sleep" passage immediately thereafter.

But if this is a Hamlet of both force and variety, it is also a Hamlet of very little warmth. The actor seems to regard his man as the victim of an intellectual malaise rather than as the hero of an agonizing but nevertheless honorable intellectual struggle. You do feel that this excitable, playful, and perverse prince would have got himself unto trouble anywhere; he emerges neither a very universal nor a very sympathetic figure.

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The Polonius of Pierre Bertin is richly humorous, sharply defined. M. Bertin's courtier is not so much an earnest or well meaning fool, but a smug and self-satisfied one—a Polonius who deserves everything that comes to him. Jacques Dacqmine again demonstrates his extraordinary vigor and sensitivity as an uneasy but businesslike Claudius, and Jean Desailly makes an effective Horatio.

The translation into French, played uncut at the Ziegfeld, was provided by Andre Gide, and the Renaud-Barrault company has made haunting use of a score by Arthur Honegger. Andre Masson's costumes are handsomely formalized, and his settings are simple without being scanty. They have, in fact, one tremendous merit: they serve as a floor for the actors rather as a tomb in which to engulf them. The production as a whole has a clean, direct air about it, and collectors of "Hamlet" cannot help but be interested.

"HAMLET"

Play by William Shakespeare; translated into French by Andre Gide; music by Arthur Honegger; staged by Jean-Louis Barrault; decor and costumes by Andre Masson; presented by S. Hurok at the Ziegfeld Theatre, December 1, 1952. The cast:

Claudius.....Jacques Dacqmine
Hamlet.....Jean-Louis Barrault
Polonius.....Pierre Bertin
Horatio.....Jean Desailly
Laertes.....Jean-Claude Michel
Rosencrantz.....
Jean-Francois Calve
Guildenstern.....Gabriel Cattand
Osric.....Jean-Pierre Granval
A Priest.....Regis Outin
Francisco.....Jacques Galland
Bernardo.....Serge Perrault
Marcellus.....Regis Outin
Reynaldo.....Jacques Galland
Player King.....Beauchamp
Lucianus.....Serge Perrault
1st Gravedigger..Charles Mahieu
2nd Gravedigger..Pierre Sonner
Fortinbras..Jean-Francois Calve
Gertrude..Marie-Helene Daste
Ophelia.....Simone Valere
Player Queen.....Anne Carrere
Ghost of Hamlet's Father...
Jean Juillard

DAILY NEWS

December 2, 1952

Barrault and His French Players Act a Stunning, Vibrant 'Hamlet'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

The French players from the Theatre Marigny have saved their best for the last. Last evening at the Ziegfeld Theatre they presented, as the final bill of their repertoire, a stunning and vibrant "Hamlet," with Jean-Louis Barrault in the title role.

We who speak and read and think in English have never minded cribbing great dramas from the Germans, the Norwegians, the French, the Russians and the Swedes. But many of us, I feel, are so immovably grounded in the belief that Shakespeare is our very own, the master of our tongue, that we haven't given much thought to what might be done with Shakespeare in translation.

Much has been done with Shakespeare in Andre Gide's adaptation of "Hamlet," and all of it seemed good to me last evening. In French it has beauty—not the sonorous beauty of the original, for the language is not gaited for sonority, but certainly the beauty of clarity and grace.

A Memorable Performance.

In performance, this Gide adaptation is superb. I've seen a good many Hamlets of a good many qualities ranging from terrible and dull to fine and inspiring, and Barrault's is one of the most memorable. Often Barrault is quick or whimsical, but always he is intelligent and upon occasion he is magnificent as the young, ill-starred Prince of Denmark.

His performance of Hamlet — and performance is a more sensible word than interpretation — is resourceful and highly individual. At times he is a most cynically humorous Dane, giving the part a touch that I never have witnessed before. For instance, his feigning of madness seems to strike him as a delightful practical joke, and he is almost gay as he undertakes his duel with Laertes. Yet, again, Barrault rises to shocking ferocity. His scene in his mother's bedroom is as stirring a reading as I can recall.

Good All Down The Line.

Once again, the fine general quality of this acting company from Paris is apparent. Jacques Dacqmine's King Claudius is notable for its force and sinister quality. Pierre Bertin makes less of a bore of Polonius than most actors do, and Marie-Helene Daste is quite good as the queen. Simone Valere's Ophelia is completely lovely and touching, and there is quite a bit more to her mad scene than we usually get. Among others who should be thanked for their work are Jean Desailly as Horatio, Jean-Claude Michel as Laertes, Beauchamp as the Player King and Charles Mahieu as the second gravedigger. It struck me last evening that I'd heard more from the ghost of Hamlet's father than usual, and all of it was excellent theatre as played by Jean Juillard.

This is, indeed, a pretty full "Hamlet," with few scenes eliminated. The settings, by Andre Masson, are mostly curtains and serve fairly well—but the production is not remarkable physically. Musically, however, it is arresting, for Arthur Honegger composed a bit of a score which is startingly effective in the players' scene. And Honegger hailed the appearance of the ghost with the simplest and weirdest music—the slow pulsing of a drum, and over it a continuous, high, single note which is almost unnerving in its insistence.

I guess Shakespeare isn't exclusively ours, after all.

Journal American

December 2, 1952

French Production Novel But Brilliant

By JOHN McCLAIN

THE FRENCH repertory company of Madeleine Renaud and Jean-Louis Barrault presented at the Ziegfeld Theatre last night a brilliant interpretation of "Hamlet," translated into French by Andre Gide, and performed with a novel and striking disregard for the nuances of the great tragedy as we have come to know them.

Barrault's "Hamlet" is a sprightly and almost elfin character who doesn't really haul off and chew the scenery until the situation has irrevocably overtaken him in the Third Act. Maybe this is a good idea, for it makes his tragedy seem more tangible by contrast.

The French tongue, much of it flying past this rusty ear, lends itself to this interpretation; in a purely lyric quality it seems to bring deeper shades of emotion to many of the famous scenes.

"To be or not to be . . .", for instance, is given an almost literal translation.

M. Barrault whispers part, holds his ground steadfastly throughout and never resorts to gesture and gesticulation beyond a careful and rather studied enunciation of the key declamations. Yet it expresses his bewilderment with dedication and sincerity.

Latin Slant

That is certainly not the Anglo-Saxon approach to the situation but maybe we've been wrong all these years; certainly he and his fellow workers succeed in bringing a completely Latin slant to the proceedings, and who's to say they're out of line? The French should know as much about the emotions of the Dane's as the British.

In the same vein Simone Valere, as Ophelia, plays her mad scene almost as a ballet. One was not particularly with her up to this point, for it seemed she had almost methodically suppressed her preliminary scenes, but once she comes on with the tattered dress and the far-away eyes, she is in complete charge.

She gets more singing and dancing into the act than many of her predecessors, but again the contrast is effective in an ingenuous way. Many Ophelias seem sad in their derrangement; this one appears quite contented and gay.

Pierre Bertin brings the same almost pixie quality to the role of Polonious; in this version he is not so much the befuddled old man as the bright and jovial philosopher.

This same French shading cannot, of course, be implicit in all the parts. I thought that Marie-Helene Daste played the Queen with about the same concentration and heavy-handedness as the other queens in my memory, and that goes for the King, Jacques Dacqmine.

And there isn't a lot to be done with Rosencrants and Guildenstern, either; or Laertes, who manages to remain highly demonstrative in any language, or Horatio; the original "stout fellow".

In production the same ingenuity, the off-center approach prevails. With a few steps and doorways and a complicated system of curtains, Andre Masson has contrived to deliver the 30-odd scenes without a pause in the action. The light shifts, a curtain is lifted or moved laterally, and the entire premises are switched from a balcony to a boudoir.

If, at one point, a curtain unexpectedly revealed a modern stage hand moving a bench it must be remembered that this was the first public run through in New York.

The music of Arthur Honegger and an excellent off-stage orchestra add greatly to the mood of the proceedings.

"Hamlet" is the most ambitious and generally acceptable effort of this fine French company which will conclude its tenancy of the Ziegfeld next Saturday evening. It has been a notable and highly successful venture all around—and we hope to welcome them back another year.

New York World-Telegram and The [illegible] Sun

December 2, 1952

Hamlet With a Sense of Humor

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

In the last bill of their current season here, the French players at the Ziegfeld offer their most familiar play, Shakespeare's "Hamlet." In startling style the troupe shows once more how endless and complex are the legitimate interpretations of the tragedy.

This is a swift and vigorous presentation, going on in a world where people are naturally animated. Hamlet feints a punch at Horatio, they slap each other on the back, one man hits another's chest for emphasis, or pats his cheek ironically.

A Sense of Humor.

The whole play, as Jean-Louis Barrault directs it, turns on Hamlet's sense of humor or proportion. He has an appreciation of the ridiculous. Sometimes when his anger has reached its most passionate and consuming, he makes a joke, and so cools off and calms himself. All of this is a steadying process.

Rather than faint-hearted and confused, he is calculating. He forces himself to indulge in vicious jokes and ironic contemptuousness. His struggle is for aloofness from dismying passion, so he can carry out his ultimate purpose.

The result of this plan is that the central character is most heated and intense at the beginning of the play. Barrault places unusual emphasis on the prince's great love for his dead father, choking almost to the point of sobs at mention of him at the start. A strange pinched whistle and drummed pulse accompanies the ghost's appearances most movingly.

Frenzied Crescendo.

At the revelation of murder, Hamlet bids Horatio a warm and touching farewell that indicates it is the beginning of the end.

Through these earlier passages Hamlet is like a black spider, taut, waiting to leap. His "Oh, what a rogue and peasant slave am I" speech is ripped out of his insides, and the later "To be or not to be" is much of it whispered in a weird argument with himself.

The music, the players and Hamlet's talk to the guilty king, combine to achieve a crazy crescendo. After the bedroom scene with his mother, with bitter flamboyance he drags the body of Polonius across the room. He departs for England leaving the king with an insulting curtsey.

Fun With a Skull.

These acts are less madness than perverse and tortured humor, used as a valve to control his precious anger. The contempt Hamlet feels for humanity is most clear when he holds the skull of his old friend up, making it nod and bow while he talks to it, or cuddling it irreverently against his cheek.

Simone Valere as Ophelia has some startling moments in the mad scene when she approaches her brother, and when she is dribbling her flowers away. Jean Desailly makes Horatio most understandable as the only person on earth Hamlet can trust, and Jean-Claude Michel has great intensity as the bitter Laertes.

Polonius is elderly and cheering instead of the usual booby, as Pierre Bertin plays him, and Charles Mahieu is a salty old character as the gravedigger.

The production is one of beautiful simplicity, which should be both breath taking and memorable when the electricians learn their cues. The Honegger score is vigorous and exciting.

All in all, it is a brilliantly stimulating "Hamlet" Barrault has created, and one in which he acts on similar terms.